

Message Text

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PAGE 01 TUNIS 08858 171640Z
ACTION NEA-10

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O R 171550Z DEC 76
FM AMEMBASSY TUNIS
TO USDA IMMEDIATE
INFO USDOC
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY RABAT
SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 5253

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RABAT FOR AGATTACHE

USDOC FOR CAGNE

E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: EPAP, BBAK, TS
SUBJECT: IMPORT OF KENNEBEC SEED POTATOES INTO TUNISIA

REF: RABAT 6041 REPEATING FASTO 62

1. (SUMMARY) TUNISIAN SEED POTATO IMPORTERS CALLED ON EMBASSY/USAID DECEMBER 16 REQUESTING ASSISTANCE IN CLEARING OF SEED POTATOES BEING IMPORTED IN LARGE QUANTITIES FOR THE FIRST TIME FROM THE US. LATER IN DAY OFFICIAL OF MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE'S OFFICE OF AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION ALSO CALLED ON US FOR BACKGROUND ON US EXPORTER AND OTHER REASSURANCE ON QUESTIONS OF PHYTOSANITATION. SAID QUESTIONS OF SANITATION HAVE BEEN RAISED, APPARENTLY BY FRENCH COMPETITORS, POSING RISK OF QUARANTINE OF SHIPMENT SCHEDULED TO ARRIVE TUNIS NEXT WEEK. ACTION REQUESTED: URGENTLY REQUIRE INFORMATION ON USDA SANITARY CERTIFICATION AND, IF APPROPRIATE, EXPORTER TO LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PAGE 02 TUNIS 08858 171640Z

REASSURE GOT. (END SUMMARY)

2. FRANCE HAS BEEN TUNISIA'S TRADITIONAL SUPPLIER OF SEED POTATOES. DUE TO THIS YEAR'S ACUTE POTATO SHORTAGE IN EUROPE AND SUBSEQUENT HIGH PRICES, TUNISIANS TURNED TO US MARKET AND FOUND THAT, EVEN ON C.I.F. BASIS, PRICES

ARE LOWER.

3. WHEN TUNISIANS PLACED ORDERS FOR 2,000 TONS, FRENCH EXPORTERS APPARENTLY BECAME CONCERNED THEY MIGHT LOSE THE MARKET PERMANENTLY. REPORTEDLY THEY SENT LETTER TO MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE CASTING DOUBTS ON SANITARY CONDITIONS OF US SEEDS, RAISING SPECTOR OF SPINDLE TUBER, BACTERIAL WILT, ETC. TUNISIAN AUTHORITIES ON DECEMBER 15 PUBLISHED NOTICE IN LOCAL NEWSPAPERS CALLING FOR PHYTOSANITARY CERTIFICATES, WITH DETAILED SUPPLEMENTARY DECLARATION REGARDING VARIOUS POSSIBLE AFFLICTIONS, ON POTATO SEEDS IMPORTED FROM WHATEVER SOURCE. (TRANSLATION OF TEXT FOLLOWS BY SEPTTEL.)

4. ON DECEMBER 16 GOT AGRICULTURAL OFFICIAL CALLED ON EMBASSY/USAID. HE ACKNOWLEDGED HAVING COPY OF USDA PHYTOSANITARY CERTIFICATE (WE HAVE REQUESTED COPY) BUT NEVERTHELESS SOUGHT ASSURANCES REGARDING PROTECTION AFFORDED BY USDA PROCEDURES AND INFORMATION ON REPUTATION OF EXPORTING FIRM FRUITEX. FIRST 1000 TONS SEED POTATOES EXPORTED BY FRUITEX CORP (P.O. BOX 45586, LOS ANGELES, CALIF.) DUE TO ARRIVE TUNIS FROM US DURING WEEK OF DECEMBER 20.

5. IN ORDER TO REASSURE TUNISIAN AUTHORITIES THAT US SEEDS ARE SAFE AND ADMISSABLE IMPORTS, EMBASSY URGENTLY REQUESTS INFORMATION ON USDA SANITARY REGULATIONS APPLYING TO EXPORTED SEED POTATOES, GENERAL PRACTICE IN ISSUING PHYTOSANITARY CERTIFICATES, AND IF APPROPRIATE INFORMATION ON FRUITEX. IF POSSIBLE WITHIN SHORT TIME LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PAGE 03 TUNIS 08858 171640Z

FRAME, WOULD APPRECIATE SPECIFIC ADVICE ON CONFORMITY OF US EXPORTS TO NEWLY PROMULGATED GOT REGULATIONS AS OUTLINED SEPTTEL.
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